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**Adolescent constructions of gendered identities: the role of sport
and (physical) education**

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Adolescent constructions of gendered identities: the role of sport and (physical) education

Abstract: Participation in sport and Physical Education (PE) has historically been heavily gendered, and the glorification of masculinity and sporting prowess is viewed as a potentially negative influence on participation for both males and females. This paper explores male and female experiences of sport and PE to grasp how the field of physical culture represents a space for the development and enactment of gendered behaviours and norms within an active identity. Fifty-one individual or paired semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 young men and 37 young women in Year 11 (aged 15–16) at three demographically varied schools in North East England. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa, this paper demonstrates that these young people identify feeling trapped in gendered norms and beliefs which recreate rigid notions of acceptable behaviours for young men and women. Interviewees often described gender in biological terms through a belief that masculinity is associated with maleness and femininity with femaleness. Through encouraging reflexivity as part of the interview process, young people were able to identify the (usually) non-conscious elements of their gendered habitus, which represent the taken-for-granted assumptions about masculinity and femininity which direct practice. Perceived gender pressures lead to self- and peer-surveillance within PE environments, whereby capital is allocated to gender- and sport-appropriate bodies. These findings suggest that PE and school structures regulate adolescent bodies, affecting participation in sport and physical activity in heavily gendered ways. Therefore, limited opportunities are available for young people to transgress the restrictive social norms which normalise the role of sport and PE for a successful male identity whilst simultaneously undermining the presence of an athletic female.

Keywords: Gender; habitus; physical education; sport; identity

Introduction

Physical Education (PE) is often identified politically as a panacea for solving the 'problem' of physical inactivity, with a belief that a young person's positive relationship with PE will track into lifelong physical activity (Redelius, Fagrell, & Larsson, 2009; Wright & Burrows,

2006; Wright & Lavery, 2010). Young men participate in more physical activity and sport than young women, leading to young women being problematised regarding their lack of engagement in, or aptitude for, PE (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Fagrell, Larsson, & Redelius, 2012; Oliver & Kirk, 2016). Whilst a lack of continued participation in sport and PE for most young women is worrying, the identification of girls as a ‘problem’ group reinforces a negative relationship with PE. Oliver and Kirk (2016) highlight that there is no single solution to the problem of girls and PE, and focus should instead consider what can be done for specific girls in specific contexts.

The focus of this paper is young people’s development of an active identity, of which PE is a core site within the field of physical culture (O’Donovan, Sandford, & Kirk, 2015). Whilst there are nuanced differences between sport, PE and physical activity, this paper explores how an active identity, which can be performed in all (or some) of these areas, may be shaped by gendered norms. Gender norms can emphasise opportunities or constraints for young people’s engagement in being physically active. Concepts of masculinity and femininity are difficult to describe or define; however, Connell’s (1987) gender order provides a basis for the differentiation of expected gendered behaviours and dispositions based on one’s assumed identity as either male or female. Increasing academic focus has demonstrated the fluidity of gender (Butler, 1990; Schippers, 2007); however, through its social construction, gender norms are often reduced to binary and oppositional understandings of masculinity and femininity. For many young people in this paper, gender operates as a binary reflecting traditional and stereotypical gender norms which mirror one’s biological sexed body. Therefore, the use of the term ‘gender’ refers to the social construction of norms, expectations of masculinity and femininity; whereas, ‘sex’ refers to one’s biological status as male or female.

Previous research has explored how the gendered nature of PE practices contribute to a gendered knowledge which influences the way in which young men and women view their gendered physical capabilities (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Fagrell et al., 2012; Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003; Scraton, 1992). Extensive research by Jan Wright in Australia (1996, 1997; Wright & Burrows, 2006; Wright & Lavery, 2010) has established that gendered norms and expectations permeate young people's experiences of PE and physical activity. Her research has emphasised the importance of PE as a site where gendered norms are heavily influential, and potentially damaging. Furthermore, Scraton's (1992), now classic study, showed how girls are marginalised in the field of PE, whereby sport and PE are often seen as incongruent with the female/feminine identity. More recent research has demonstrated that the tendency for young women to disengage with PE continues (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Croston & Hills, 2017; Fagrell et al., 2012; Mitchell, Inchley, Fleming, & Currie, 2015; Scraton, 2018). These examples illustrate how most gender and PE research is based on the experiences of either females, or males (e.g. Gerdin, 2015; Hill, 2015; Mennesson, Bertrand, & Court, 2017), but rarely address male and female gender relations. As Connell (2007) suggests, femininity cannot be understood without exploring masculinity, emphasising the importance of conducting research to explore how one's conceptualisation of gender varies or reproduces stereotypical expectations of behaviour for young men and women.

Informed by Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa, and how young people develop and possess a gendered habitus (McLeod, 2005), this paper focuses on 15–16-year-olds during a transitional period between childhood and adulthood characterised by tensions and 'rules'. Cicourel (1993) has critiqued Bourdieu's work for largely ignoring the experiences of children, and recently, some scholars have addressed this gap by applying Bourdieu's theoretical tools to PE, particularly in relation to illustrating gender issues and

inequalities in school PE (Gorely et al., 2003; Hunter, 2004; O'Donovan et al., 2015; Redelius et al., 2009). There are two advantages to using a Bourdieusian framework in this paper. Firstly, the embodied habitus offers a method and framework to explore young people's physical experiences of being active (in both sport and PE). By using Bourdieu's principles of habitus, field and capital to guide interview questions which sought to highlight and challenge young people's binary gender assumptions, this method provided an opportunity to raise young people's awareness of gender norms and taken-for-granted assumptions within the doxa. The second advantage relates to the allocation of capital to valorised gendered identities offers an insight into the reproduction of stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity for young people. This paper draws conclusions about how the development of the gendered habitus can lead to the accrual of social capital for young people if individual actions, dispositions and behaviours match socially constructed gendered norms of traditional masculinity and femininity.

Adolescent gendered identities

Integral to the theorisation of adolescent gendered identities in this paper is Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, where people's practices and behaviours are influenced by 'systems of transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Despite the habitus originally referring to one's classed dispositions and tastes, the possession of a gendered habitus demonstrates that '[w]hat constitutes male and female...is heavily inscribed in bodily habitus and practices that are regarded as either normal and therefore justified, or deviant and shunned' (Iisahunter, Smith, & Emerald, 2015, p. 10). The habitus encompasses taken-for-granted expectations about gender which are often assumed to be 'natural', and within specific fields a struggle for legitimacy indicates which gendered identities are legitimised (Gao, 2015; Iisahunter et al., 2015). The social construction of masculinity is strongly associated with maleness, and is characterised by sporting prowess, musculature, physical dominance and confidence (Gerdin,

2015). In contrast, femininity is usually bestowed for females and reflects a subordination to masculinity through expectations of attractiveness, physical thinness, and an aversion to sports (Connell, 1987). As lisahunter et al. (2015, p. 7) argue, ‘enduring cultural values, beliefs, dispositions and actions are both embodied in the individual and embedded in the social structures that constitute a way of being and behaving’, demonstrating how cultural values of masculinity and femininity can become familiar and taken-for-granted. This familiar and unquestioned understanding of masculinity and femininity can become doxic, functioning as common sense beliefs misrecognised as a universal point of view (Bourdieu, 1998). To this extent, Bourdieu (1968, p. 689) argues that ‘social relations...appear to individuals as natural’. It is therefore appropriate to apply his work to gender when viewed as socially constructed, formed through the intersubjectivity of lived human relations.

Under Bourdieu’s field theory, each field represents the site of a struggle for legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1985). Young people are participants in different fields, for example, schooling, family, and peer culture (Dagkas & Quarmby, 2015); and the struggles for legitimacy in each field indicate which practices are allocated most capital. Wright and Macdonald (2010) suggest that literature about young people’s physical activity ignores the complexity of their lives, and research must consider the broader interconnection of social fields to explore how these influence a person’s relationship with physical activity. Furthermore, fields overlap: Dagkas and Quarmby (2015) indicate that the fields of family, schooling and peer culture contribute to an individual’s disposition towards physical activity. Thus, experiences of PE or sport should not be researched in isolation from other fields and contexts in which young people find themselves. The potential transfer of capital from one field to another indicates the complexity of identities and the relationship between one’s habitus and practice. Through one’s gendered habitus which is influenced by, and operates across, multiple and interrelated fields, this paper explores how one’s gendered habitus may

reproduce dominant representations of masculinity and femininity, reinforcing the role of sport in the male habitus and marginalising the athletic female. An important consideration for this paper is the way in which the dangerous conflation of gender onto sex represents a lived experience for young people, leading to gender being interpreted as an ideology of difference (Arnot, 2002).

Bourdieu identified different types of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic), and how accumulating this contributes to one's position within social space (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001). Given the struggles for legitimacy which characterise social fields, different representations of one's gendered habitus can increase (or limit) the accrual of social and symbolic capital (Lawler, 2004). The accrual of social capital is important for young people as their peer social networks place an increased emphasis on social status and popularity, where conforming to socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity is often rewarded (Read, Francis, & Skelton, 2011). Social capital indicated through status and 'popularity' in young people often follows traditional gendered norms; sporting prowess is valorised for young men (Bramham, 2003), whereas traditional feminine appearance is rewarded for young women (Read et al., 2011). Gao's (2015) application of Bourdieu's concepts to the body, suggests that our bodily hexis is formed by relationships with other people and our world. Peer social relationships, which hold particular significance for young people, have importance for the development of one's body-hexis and its reflection of broader norms of masculinity and femininity. By exploring the ways young people construct their gendered identities, this paper studies how participation in sport and PE may be influenced by peer group norms (through a collective habitus) which reinforce the importance of stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity.

School PE has historically reproduced elements of hegemonic masculinity through sport-based curricula which prioritise historical and stereotypical representations of

masculinity (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Bramham, 2003; Garrett, 2004; Mennesson et al., 2017). Within the field of PE, young people who match the expectations of the PE habitus are valued highly by teachers and can accrue physical capital (Brown, 1999; lisahunter et al., 2015). The translation of physical capital in PE into forms of capital valued in other social fields is often gendered; young men can use their sporting prowess and status across different fields. In contrast, young women are often marginalised by PE curricula and practices (Fagrell et al., 2012; Garrett, 2004), suggesting that for many young women a negative relationship with sport and physical activity has become embodied within one's habitus. This consistency in how young women are problematised in PE supports the use of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital in this paper to explore how dominant gender norms become internalised and replicated in the behaviours of young people.

The present study

This research draws on data collected within a broader study which focuses on the complexities of young people's gendered identities across different fields including schooling, sport, media and physical culture. The young people in this study attended three demographically different schools in the North East of England; School 1 is a comprehensive 11–16 state school in a deprived area with a higher than national average level of students receiving free school meals (FSM; used as a proxy for socio-economic status; David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001). School 2 is a high-achieving 11–18 comprehensive school with lower than average FSM data, rated among the best state schools nationally. School 3 is a mixed independent fee-paying day and boarding school, which has historically been boys-only, only admitting female students in the past 20 years. The schools were chosen because their catchment areas, ethos and priorities differ, providing an indicator as to how the habitus developed through one's school environment can constrain or enhance young peoples' opportunities to be physically active.

All students in Year 11 at each school (aged 15–16; $n = 332$) completed a questionnaire including questions about their self-identified sex, participation in sport/physical activity, perceptions of masculinity/femininity, enjoyment of PE, and identification of willingness to be interviewed. Of those prepared to be interviewed ($n = 117$), 33 young men and 37 young women were selected. Interviewees were chosen based on their questionnaire responses, to produce a varied sample in relation to their self-reported participation in sport/physical activity and normative or extreme views of masculinity/femininity. Reflecting the diversity of the research locations, the young people interviewed were predominantly white ($n = 67$, black $n = 1$, Asian $n = 2$), which was representative of the broader demographics of the young people at each school. The interconnection between gender, race and class is complex (Macdonald, Abbott, Knez, & Nelson, 2009). Subtle, but distinct, nuances between young people's experiences from each school was evident, and these classed distinctions informed the analysis conducted; however, these specific differences are beyond the scope of this paper. Within this paper, the views of young people across each of the three schools are presented, framed within a broader narrative of being trapped by gender norms.

Young people were offered the option to be interviewed either individually or with a friend. Interviews followed a semi-structured format which covered: their understanding of gender; contradictions and complexities in their representation of identity; PE and sport; and the social hierarchy within adolescent fields. Interviews lasted between 30–60 minutes (average 46 minutes). All names used in this paper are pseudonyms allocated randomly during transcription. Where necessary during interviews, photo prompts were used which included images of different sporting and gendered bodies, some participating in traditionally sex-appropriate sports and others in non-sex-appropriate sports (similar to Gorely et al., 2003). Sex-appropriate sports refer to the normative assumptions which equate individual

sports as being suited to either young men or women based on the characteristics of the sport and their congruence to dominant binary gender norms (Matteo, 1986). The photo prompts were used to support questions asked around the young people's understanding of masculinity and femininity, eliciting discussion by asking the interviewees to justify their selection of photos they thought were masculine, feminine or 'unsure'. Moreover, an emoji scale was used to help young people discuss their feelings about their physical (gendered) appearance, and a visual aid which depicted gender as ranging from extreme hyper-masculinity to extreme emphasised femininity was used to encourage young people to avoid categorising gender as binary and to illustrate that one's gender identity can be fluid.

A thematic analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding to develop themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Following transcription, all interviews were read, re-read, and relevant excerpts were highlighted in accordance either with data-emergent ideas, or with theory-driven themes based on Bourdieu's theoretical tools. The dominant theme discussed in this paper refers to the development of a gendered habitus. The thread which links the empirical data is one of young people expressing a feeling of being trapped by gender norms and expectations. This feeling of being trapped also relates to the empirical sub-themes of gender norms acting through the non-conscious; and the peer policing of adolescent gendered identities. Whilst beyond the scope of this paper, a few young people resisted this idea of being trapped. This broad discussion of being trapped therefore represents an overall picture, within which some covert resistance occurs, but these instances do not disturb the general gendering of identities which this paper outlines.

Discussion: adolescent development of a gendered habitus

Through incorporating Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa, this discussion firstly considers the way in which young people expressed a sense of being trapped by rigid gender norms which equate masculinity with male, and femininity with female. Extending the use of habitus as an explanatory tool, the way in which gender norms act through the (often) non-conscious habitus is explored. Finally, this discussion considers how through peer-policing, young people monitor and reinforce traditional binary configurations of gender which reflect normative notions masculinity and femininity.

Trapped by gender norms

In their interviews, many young people expressed very traditional understandings of gender, whereby masculinity and femininity reflect stereotypical ideas around gender roles and norms. Inherent in these discussions was the idea that gender is intrinsically linked to one's sex. Danny (School 1; his emphasis) stated that 'a male body will always be masculine because it *is* a male body', and Vicky (School 1) stated that 'because I am biologically female, I'm expected to act in a certain way'. These quotes illustrate the power of the sex binary in influencing the expectation of gender as 'simply' mapping straight onto biology. This reinforces a gender ideology based on difference which, through the embodied habitus, is reproduced in practice. The importance of socialisation of gender norms was identified, such that 'people grow up with [stereotypes] so they become kind of normal, making young people think in certain ways' (Lucy, School 2). By identifying their performances of gender as dependent on their sex, these young people appear fixed in reproducing a gender binary which limits representations which challenge the assumption that being male equals masculinity and being female equals femininity.

Young people reiterated the role of sport as indicative of a successful representation of masculinity, reflecting the expectation for young men to demonstrate sporting prowess and

competency. The synonymy in which sport, in all schools and interviews, equated with being male (and therefore masculine) is explained by Jonny (School 1): 'I couldn't picture myself as a girl...I prefer [being male] for the fact that I'm more into my sports and I couldn't picture myself not playing them.' The implicit assumption here is that sports do not equate with being female, and thus an (able) sporting body is crucial within a 'successful' male, and masculine, habitus. In contrast, for femininity, across all schools and interviews, young people outlined that stereotypical notions of attractiveness are important for a 'successful' feminine habitus. A definition of how these young people typically viewed stereotypical feminine attractiveness is provided by Jojo (School 1) who outlines that '[females] should be slim, a little curvy, but not too curvy... paint your nails, have nice hair, do your makeup', reflecting Connell's (1987) concept of emphasised femininity. The doxic nature of expectations of feminine attractiveness is explored by Rachel (School 1) who suggests that feminine attractiveness is 'natural' and 'something that you grow up with and get used to'. In relation to the development of an active identity, femininity remains viewed as incongruent with sport: '...there are some girls who think that you can't be pretty and do well in sport, they probably think they have to choose' (Lydia, School 2). For these young people, there is an expectation that a 'successful' feminine identity is attractive, indicating how young women can feel trapped in reproducing (heterosexual) attractiveness to position themselves 'safely' within their social environment. For these young people, social capital is allocated to legitimate and authentic representations of gender, which are congruent with stereotypical masculinity and femininity. Therefore, overtly challenging gender norms through one's appearance becomes too risky for young people and the gender binary is reinforced.

These rigid and traditional representations of gender, which these young people often conflated with sex, have repercussions for how they consequently construct their own gendered identity. The power of gender norms is emphasised by Bourdieu's concept of

allodoxia, which Mead (2016, p. 62) describes as ‘the belief that something is “for me”’. If gender norms are internalised as being ‘for me’, young people enter social situations where portraying an acceptable gender is not only expected, but essential. An outward display of gender which is intelligible (Westbrook & Schilt, 2013), is crucial for young people’s social acceptance, and thus conforming to social norms takes on greater importance. For instance:

Everyone is expected...to be masculine you’re expected to act in a certain way...there’s a lot of pressure on males but it’s not as obvious [as for females]. Everyone is expected to fit into these two definitions of masculinity and femininity, and not everyone does, like people who are non-specific with their gender, it makes them *have* to fit in. (Vicky, School 1; her emphasis)

This quote illustrates the pressure that young people face to display an intelligible and recognisable representation of masculinity or femininity. Vicky is astute in highlighting the way that pressure is faced by males as well as females, countering traditional ideas in which only females are pressurised by gender (Bordo, 2003). Tension exists for all young people who differ from these socially constructed expectations: because the conflation of gender with sex emphasises the ‘natural’ role of sport for males, and attractiveness for females, alternative possibilities for gendered identities are limited. Read et al. (2011) found that with 12–13-year-old girls, popularity was associated with presenting an appropriate version of femininity. My research has shown that Read et al.’s (2001) findings are also relevant to both older girls, *and* boys, as shown with these 15–16-year-olds. Young men and women whose gendered identities match stereotypical expectations can accrue more social and symbolic capital within adolescent social fields, which leads to higher social status and popularity. Through capital being allocated to representations of gender which reinforce traditional notions of emphasised femininity and elements of hegemonic masculinity, the reproduction

of these norms becomes accepted and, to a certain degree, expected. Therefore, the gendered habitus which recreates and rewards difference between young men and women, is valued.

Specifically considering young people's relationships with sport within a gendered habitus, these interviews highlighted how the value attached to sport differs in relation to whether sporting prowess is viewed as an identity or an ability. Across all three schools, young men viewed sport as integral to their sense of identity and self-worth. In contrast, young women typically considered sport as akin to an ability, something they could do, rather than something integral to their sense of self. Discussing the difference in attitudes towards sport and PE, Ricky (School 1) identified this difference: '[be]cause stereotypically, females aren't as interested in sport, lots of them like makeup'; Millie (School 1) stated, 'I'm not one of those people whose life revolves around sport, but I do enjoy it'; and Chantel (School 3) identified, 'I can play sports, [I'm] not necessarily sporty, but I can'. Sport is internalised within the male habitus, meaning young men can accumulate capital through sporting success, in ways which do not occur for young women. Worryingly for the way that female participation in PE is problematised (Fagrell et al., 2012; Oliver & Kirk, 2016), some of young women described a very unhealthy relationship with PE, often withdrawing effort to maintain their feminine appearance. This is evident from Alexa's account (School 1, her emphasis): 'if there are boys there, you *have* to look good...it makes you weaker in sport, because you're afraid to give 100 percent because you're scared you'll look more masculine'. This illustrates that within the field of school sport and PE, a physically able and athletic female is often perceived as illegitimate and therefore unable to accrue social capital. In contrast, the prioritisation of male athleticism and achievement is glorified and celebrated, becoming a norm which is reproduced and reinforced through the tastes, dispositions and practices associated with the male gendered habitus. These norms which become taken-for-granted, doxic knowledge within the habitus, permeate how young people understand their

expected gendered behaviour, and the interplay between the conscious and non-conscious habitus reproduces these stereotypical norms in a powerful way.

Gender norms acting through the non-conscious

The habitus, by nature of its embodiment, may be beyond conscious reflection and the internalisation of social structures leads to particular ways of doing gender (Iisahunter et al., 2015). For the young people interviewed, discussions about their gendered practices allowed a reflection on their habitus in action. Interviews demonstrated the young people were aware of gender norms which influence their behaviour, but reflected that they have become so accustomed to these norms that they often operate at a non-conscious level. These taken-for-granted doxic norms of the gendered habitus, in practice, ‘operate below the level of consciousness and language as a “feel for the game”’ (Adkins, 2003, p. 24), representing a non-conscious response to external environments which reproduce stereotypical and idealised versions of gender. However, if the habitus was completely non-conscious, young people would not be able to talk about it; instead, in interviews, the interplay between reflexivity and practice allowed the taken-for-granted gendered behaviours and dispositions to be ‘seen’ and discussed:

By this time in life, you’re not so much aware of [gender] because it’s happening all the time, like always happening. The stereotypical expectations...that’s kind of inbuilt. You become used to it and it’s nothing that you notice. (Gary, School 2)

...in day-to-day life you don’t think about [gender], you plod along doing what you’re doing without really thinking why. (Max, School 2)

The way in which young people spoke of gender as ‘happening all the time’ and being ‘used to it’, explains how one’s gendered habitus is both conscious because people are aware of gender norms, and non-conscious, affecting young people’s behaviours without deliberate

thought. Young people's expectations of masculinity and femininity are powerful because through the gendered habitus they are not consciously thought about prior to, and during, practice. Change to the gendered habitus is therefore problematic. By being trapped in a cycle of reproducing stereotypical gender norms at a non-conscious level, there are fewer opportunities for young people to challenge stereotypical and historical representations of masculinity and femininity.

Across many interviews, different terms were used to signify the way in which gendered expectations operate at a non-conscious level. Chantel (School 3) stated, 'you're kind of *brainwashed*, your mind then thinks certain things...you're made to think a certain way, which might not be how you "normally" think, but then it becomes normal to think that way' (my emphasis). The habitus is an important conceptual tool for exploring how gender norms are believed as 'real' and acted upon by young people. Similarly, Jill (School 2) stated, 'I'm aware [of gender] sometimes, but mostly it's *just background noise*' (my emphasis). Characteristic of these descriptions is the way that cognitive action is underplayed in the exploration of gender norms. Gender is seen by these young people as 'natural', forming taken-for-granted knowledge within the doxa. The fact that gender operates within *all* fields, in *all* social situations and in *all* human interactions, yet is described as 'background noise', provides a dangerous reminder of the reproduction and perpetuation of symbolic violence which normalises a gender ideology based on difference.

The act of being interviewed may be positive for these young people in encouraging reflexivity, such that increasing consciousness of one's gendered habitus can highlight and challenge the symbolic domination which penetrates the way gender shapes young people's experiences (Adkins, 2003; Oliver & Kirk, 2016). One of the final questions the young people were asked was whether they had learnt anything about themselves or about gender from the interview. Carly (School 1) stated:

I've never really explained all of this before, it feels so weird, but now I kind of understand why there's so much pressure, and how ridiculous it is that we feel so much pressure to look and act in a certain way.

Many other young people said that only during these reflexive questions could they 'see' the gender pressures they are facing. Through reflexivity, these young people understood how their desire to conform to expectations of masculinity and femininity was based on a need to 'fit in', to match the requirements of their social field, and have their gendered identity validated through social and symbolic capital. The allocation of capital leads to the development of social hierarchies based on gendered norms which reinforce the requirement for young people to conform to stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity. By comparing oneself to others (and the taken-for-granted norm), these young people exhibited an awareness of social expectations to present a 'successful' gendered identity, developed through peer-policing which regulate doxic gender norms.

Peer-policing of adolescent gendered identities

For most young women, social judgement represents an expected part of adolescent life, being 'something you have to live with...you get used to it, you become numb to it' (Rachel, School 1). By being something which young women are 'numb to', the constant presence of peer-policing highlights the way in which young women face pressure to present an image of themselves which would 'impress everyone else' (Kiera, School 1). In considering peer-policing, the gendered norms and expectations form 'rules' which dictate what constitutes a 'successful' male or female identity.

Different permutations of gender peer-policing occur, yet young people identified 'everyone judges girls' (Kate, School 2): girls judge other girls critically on their appearance, whereas boys were understood to judge girls on their body shape. Many young women were

fearful of being judged as fat or unattractive by their male peers. Caroline (School 3) described a friend, 'she's not fat...But all the lads call her fat', and Alexa (School 1) states that with boys, 'there's just sniggers and whistles [about how you look]...it makes you feel uncomfortable'. These quotes exemplify how these young women feel objectified by their male peers. As Rachel (School 1) highlights above, many young women accept that male judgement is 'normal' and 'something you have to live with'. Despite all young women interviewed feeling pressurised by the scrutiny and judgement by young men, a lack of female collegiality demonstrates the ruthlessness of females in expecting attractiveness as a prerequisite of femininity. This lack of collegiality was expressed by Mia (School 2):

...girls are a lot more vicious about what they say, whereas boys don't really think about what they say and just say it and move on. But with girls it'll be really malicious comments... It doesn't make sense, because we're all going through the same thing, and when you're more violent with what you say than people [boys] who don't understand, there's something wrong.

When faced with the potential for judgement, the gendered habitus which rewards femininity-as-attractive is perpetuated. This focus on the aesthetic presentation of the female identity minimises the potential for young women to celebrate their embodied achievements, such as through being physically athletic and active, which traditionally challenge notions of femininity.

In contrast, young men reported judgement only from other males, not identifying feeling pressure from the gaze or judgement of young women. Instead, peer-policing of males reflected elements of bullying: 'slating someone is a way of gaining popularity. If you're seen making fun of someone...if it's funny to everyone else, then you're seen as popular' (Howard, School 1). Many of these young men appeared motivated to maintain their social status through acquiring social capital by aligning their behaviour with traditional valorised

representations of masculinity (Swain, 2003). If gender norms inculcated within the habitus are believed as 'true' by young people, these gendered norms become a standard against which social comparisons and peer-policing are measured. Through capital being allocated to 'correct' gendered identities, engaging in peer-policing becomes increasingly important to ensure one's own identity remains proximal to the socially constructed ideal.

Self-comparison and self-policing represent methods by which young people ensure they conform to gender norms and 'rules'. Instances of self-comparison highlight how young people can feel trapped to reproduce dominant gender norms, thus supporting Bordo's (2003, p. 182) conclusion that women who strive to meet gender norms 'are anything *but* the "masters" of their lives' (emphasis in original). The naturalness of young women's self-comparison is described by Jenny (School 1):

...the comparison thing, like she looks like that, I look like this. It's comparing different body types or comparing hair; if I had short hair and she has long hair, or an athletic build and I don't... the comparison thing isn't good, but you do it anyway.

Whilst self-scrutiny is typically viewed as a female phenomenon (Bordo, 2003), interviews with some young men suggest that they too are guilty of comparing their gendered identities, both to idealised norms of hegemonic masculinity, and to other people. Craig (School 3) admitted that he compares his body and identity 'almost constantly. To my friends. For example, my roommate Kyle, he's built like a rugby player, big, tall, and I often think how nice it would be to be like that'. In addition, Graham (School 2) suggested that, 'there are no specific people [I compare to], just an idea about what you should be'. An allodoxic belief in the value of presenting a socially desirable gendered identity ensures that these young people continue to feel pressurised and trapped in conforming to reproduce stereotypical expectations of masculinity and femininity to accrue social capital.

Self-comparison represents a method by which young people can increase their likelihood of accruing gender capital, and ‘winning’ at the game of gender. By comparing one’s own gendered identity, individuals are attempting to bridge ‘the gap between “is” and “ought” in the realm of the body’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 149). Through the concept of *illusio*, the belief in the game (Bourdieu, 1990), dominant perceptions of masculinity and femininity are reinforced because gender ideals are internalised within the gendered habitus. The constant scrutiny and self-comparison of the gendered body for adolescents emphasises how gender norms can be regulatory. As Schutz, Paxton, and Wertheim (2002) explored, body comparison in girls increases and assumes greater importance during adolescence. In contrast, my research has shown that body comparison in relation to gender ‘rules’ occurs for *both* males and females, demonstrating the power of the gendered habitus in influencing tastes, dispositions and actions which position young people in their social field in relation to their gendered identity.

Specifically, the field of PE was identified as a part of school life where gendered identities are heavily policed and judged. Characteristics of PE, including the process of getting changed, exposure of the body, and the fear of judgement were identified by young people as being problematic leading to the development of identity insecurities (Azzarito, 2009; O’Donovan et al., 2015). Millie (School 1) identified that she feels very uncomfortable getting changed in public:

I wear my PE kit under my school clothes! I don’t even put it in my bag, I have it on, so after the lesson I make sure I don’t smell and then put my uniform back on. I don’t want people to see me...

Millie’s experience demonstrates how intrusive and problematic peer-policing can be, leading to her drastic measures to prevent evaluation and negative judgement of her physical body. Scraton (2018, p. 6) argues that research needs to consider ‘the “unsafe” spaces that create

opportunities for bullying and anxiety about the body', and this discussion has shown how PE changing rooms continue to contribute to the development of a negative relationship with one's active gendered identity.

Within PE, young people identified being aware of pressures to conform to expected gendered norms, expressing fears and consequences of not matching with socially constructed representations of desirable gender. One student explained:

...it's the way you run, they might think you're fat or you jiggle, that happens in PE... because of the uniform, a lot of people weren't confident about their physique because they were told they had big fat legs, so this girl went to the gym and she lost so much weight, I don't think that's right, she wasn't comfortable in her body, in PE your body is exposed way more. (Alice, School 1)

This quote indicates the complex relationship between gender, sport and the body. Whilst PE has the potential to be empowering and positive for exploring one's embodiment (Garrett, 2004; Oliver & Kirk, 2016), concerns exist as to whether PE provides a necessary safe space for many young women. Within PE, the body is a vehicle for sporting success, or indeed a public failure, and young females often expressed that a withdrawal of effort is the only answer to prevent criticism or judgement. For young women, the exposure of the body, as discussed by Alice, indicates the way in which sporting participation highlights an uncomfortable tension between the active female body and the stereotypical feminine ideal.

Contrary to previous research which has documented the negative aspects of girls' PE (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Garrett, 2004), judgement and peer-policing within PE is not solely a female phenomenon. Speaking to young men who do not conform to stereotypical notions of being sporty or physically able elicited similar insecurities and concerns as those presented by some young women. Freddie (School 1) was unequivocal in stating that PE

‘should stand for Public Embarrassment, because everyone is laughing at you’. For Freddie, public performances of the body are negatively associated with a very visible disconnect with the masculine ideal, and PE represents a visible reminder of his gendered identity inadequacy. As has been discussed elsewhere (Fagrell et al., 2012; Hill, 2015), PE curriculums and practices can reinforce what a ‘successful’ gendered body (and identity) is. This paper has shown that through peer-policing, the PE environment continues to be a toxic reminder of individual failings at being successfully masculine or feminine in line with adolescent expectations of gender which promote sport for males and simultaneously ‘others’ the athletic female.

Sport is heavily associated with the adolescent male identity and habitus, and using Bourdieu’s conceptual tools, sporty males can accrue more social capital. For young men, social hierarchies are created because sporting achievement and athleticism is valued within the (classed) habitus and can lead to social status: ‘in this school, the first team rugby would be the celebrities of the school, everyone used to know who they were’ (Nate, School 3). The classed variations in sport is exemplified by the difference between rugby and football for young men from private or state schools. For Danny (School 1), ‘we [the popular group] all just play football, it’s as simple as that’, which contrasts to the way rugby is viewed as the pinnacle of masculinity at the (English) private school in this study. The celebrity status and capital which is afforded to males who excel in culturally valued sports is not consistently mirrored for sporty females, and pressure exists for females *not* to play sport. Kate (School 2) shared that, ‘if you’re in a [female] friendship group with people who don’t play sport, you kind of get put off, there’s a tension’. Despite the norms which promote sporting success for males and pressure which ‘others’ the athletic female, a small number of young people do resist these assumptions. Nevertheless, the taken-for-granted doxic norms of the collective

gendered habitus can explain common practice, and ultimately positions the sporty male, and attractive (often non-sporty) female, as dominant.

Conclusion: adolescent constructions of gendered identities

This paper has discussed the development of active gendered identities within the field of sport and PE. Young people are aware of gendered norms and expectations within the gendered habitus in ways which legitimise appropriate representations of masculinity and femininity. Significantly, young people in this study struggled to move past an understanding of gender based on an ideology of difference between one's sex as male or female. The consequences of this (mis)understanding may be that young people remain limited in their opportunities to freely express their gendered habitus. This has been referred to in this paper as young people being trapped by gendered norms, fearing, through failing to develop social capital, the consequences of presenting an identity which overtly challenges stereotypical representations of masculinity or femininity.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa have been useful for exploring how social status for young people can be developed through achieving gender distinction. An extensive body of work has shown how PE reproduces gendered norms and practices (Fagrell et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1997). This paper contributes to this literature by demonstrating the utility of drawing on Bourdieu's habitus as an explanatory tool to explore how traditional representations of gender (in which sport is congruent with the male identity and othered for a female identity) have become entrenched in the gendered habitus of young people. Only through the reflexivity encouraged during the interviews, could these young people appreciate the complexities of non-conscious gender norms enacted through practice. If these entrenched gender norms are left unchallenged and un-'seen', the reproduction of traditional norms of masculinity and femininity will continue.

There is perhaps a need to continue the work of activist researchers (e.g. Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Fissette, 2013; Oliver & Kirk, 2016) to specifically target the development of conscious-raising strategies to bring these gendered assumptions about sport and PE into young people's consciousness where they can be explicitly challenged.

This paper has shown how one's gendered habitus operates across all fields and social situations, including the field of sport and PE. This manifests in young men viewing sport as an identity compared to young women for whom sport is a possible ability, and not integral to their sense of self. Azzarito and Solomon (2005) concluded that both males and females can be marginalised in PE and sport despite the traditional problematising of girls. This present study has shown how, for young women, sport continues to be viewed as incongruent to the representation of a 'successful' feminine identity. Despite social movements and policies implemented to improve women's sport over recent years, entrenched views of what is 'right' for young women still exclude a sporty identity as a viable option within one's gendered habitus. In contrast, for young men, gender and social capital can be allocated to individuals who embody physicality and athleticism in line with notions of hegemonic masculinity. The marginalisation of young men, such as Freddie, occurs when their physical inability renders them unable to accrue social capital. In considering the lived experiences of young people, this paper has argued that the gendered habitus, based on socially entrenched views of gender which reinforces difference, is detrimental to how young men and women construct and embody an active identity through sport, PE and/or physical activity.

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